FWIS 136: The World According to Pixar
Spring 2015 (TuTh 9:25-10:40)

"I never look back…it distracts from the now."

--*The Incredibles*

"The world is often unkind to new talent, new creations; the new needs friends."

--*Ratatouille*

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Course Description:
In the summer of 2013, writer Jon Negroni posted a new essay called "The Pixar Theory" on his blog, and it very quickly went viral. Essentially, Negroni suggests that each of the films made by the Pixar animation studio is one piece of a larger narrative about the interconnectedness of our world. Whether one agrees with Negroni's argument or not, it does speak to the complexity and sophistication of the Pixar films, which critics have long hailed for their strong writing and powerful social commentary. In this course, we will be delving into the world of Pixar by watching many of the films and exercising our analytical skills through a variety of writing assignments. We will pay just as much attention to the narratives of the films as to their technical elements, such as animation and color theory, as we explore the meanings they create.

FWIS Learning Objectives:
By taking this course, students will:

- Enhance their understanding of the central place of writing and communication in the learning process and in academic life.
- Learn strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, and responding to college-level readings.
- Improve their ability to communicate correctly and effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose.
- Become comfortable with writing as a process and learn strategies—for instance, prewriting, outlining, and revision-- for working through that process.
- Learn appropriate use of the work of others and, where necessary, specific practices of citation.
- Learn to articulate oral arguments and to respond productively to arguments of others in formal presentations and in class discussion.

Other Learning Objectives:
In addition to these programmatic objectives, I also have very specific learning goals for FWIS 136. I envision this course as an educational laboratory. You will play with ideas, do some experimenting, and end up concocting new ways of understanding some very well-known films and texts. By the end of the semester, students will accomplish the following:

- You will begin to learn how to ask the right questions, a skill that is the foundation for all academic inquiry.
- You will develop a significant degree of expertise on the films of the Pixar studio.
- You will be able to assess the pedagogical goals of children's literature and media.
- You will understand and utilize the different interpretive tools needed to analyze children's literature and media.
- You will improve your skills in writing and argumentation through several different kinds of essay assignments.

Required Texts:

- Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. New York: Vintage, 2005.
- Humes, Edward. *Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash*. New York: Penguin, 2012.
- Milne, A. A. *The House at Pooh Corner*. Reissue ed. New York: Puffin, 1992.
- Negroni, Jon. "The Pixar Theory." http://jonnegroni.com/2013/07/11/the-pixar-theory/ and http://jonnegroni.com/2013/07/15/the-pixar-theory-timeline/

Required Feature-Length Films:

Central to the Course	Additional Films Necessary for Final Project
Toy Story (1995)	*A Bug's Life* (1998)
Finding Nemo (2003)	*Toy Story 2* (1999)
The Incredibles (2004)	*Monsters, Inc.* (2001)
WALL-E (2008)	*Ratatouille* (2007)
Up (2009)	*Brave* (2012)
Toy Story 3 (2010)	

Optional Text:

- Price, David A. *The Pixar Touch: The Making of a Company*. New York: Vintage, 2008.

Course Requirements:

1. *Toy Story* Character Analysis

   Choose one of the minor characters in *Toy Story* (i.e. anyone but Buzz or Woody) and argue clearly, specifically, and succinctly for the importance of this character in contributing to the overall meaning of the film. You must cite evidence from the film as

you build your analysis. These brief essays should fall somewhere **between 500-750 words** and will be due in class on Thursday, January 29th.

2. Essays

A. *Finding Nemo/Incredibles Essay*

For your first assignment, I would like for you to write an interpretive, analytical essay on **either** *Finding Nemo* **or** *The Incredibles* (not a comparison of the two) in which you construct a clear argument about the work. State the argument strongly and lucidly in the first paragraph and then spend the rest of your essay supporting your position by analyzing evidence from the film. This means that you will have to directly engage with the film via quotations. You might choose to discuss some aspect of the hero's journey, since we will be pursuing this angle in class, but you are by no means limited to this topic. The key here is to be as specific as possible in choosing your topic and exceedingly logical in building your argument.

Individual conferences for this essay will be held the week of February 16th. Essays should be **at least 1,500 words** in length, and you must bring a completed draft with you to your conference. Final versions are due on Friday, February 27th, at 2:00 p.m. in my office and must demonstrate that you have made substantial revisions based on the feedback you received at during your conference.

You should use MLA formatting, which includes the use of a Work Cited page. If you have any questions at all about the intricacies of the MLA guidelines, please let me know—they can be tricky. Please note: I will not accept any late papers. Late work will be given a grade of "F" unless (a) there are significant circumstances and (b) you talk to me no later than one class period before the assignment is due.

B. *Toy Story 3/Up Essay*

For your next assignment, I would like for you to write an interpretive, analytical essay on **either** *Toy Story 3* **or** *Up* (not a comparison of the two) in which you construct a clear argument about the work. As with the first paper, you should state the argument strongly and lucidly in the first paragraph and then spend the rest of your essay supporting your position by analyzing evidence from the film. This means that you will have to directly engage with the text via quotations. You might choose to discuss some aspect of grief and loss, since we will be pursuing these angles in class, but you are by no means limited to these topics.

Individual conferences for this essay will be held the week of March 23rd. Essays should be **at least 1,500 words** in length, and you must bring a completed draft with you to your conference. Final versions are due on Tuesday, March 31st, at 2:00 p.m. in my office and must demonstrate that you have made substantial revisions based on the feedback you received at during your conference.

C. *WALL-E* Essay

You know the drill by now. I'm looking for an analytical, argumentative essay, which should be **at least 1,500 words** in length and will be due on our last day of class—Thursday, April 23rd. There will be no official conferences for this essay, but I will hold extended office hours on the last week of class.

3. Final Project

For your final project, you will either craft a formal response to Jon Negroni's "The Pixar Theory," providing a holistic assessment of his argument, or you will create your own theory with respect to the ways in which the larger body of Pixar films work together to forge a broader commentary about the world. In order to develop a richly nuanced analysis, you will need to watch more than just the six films we will be discussing in class. To that end, I have provided a list of movies (see "Required Feature-Length Films" above) that you must also use for this project, bringing the total number of films that must be used to eleven. Although we will not talk about these extra films in class, there will be some opportunities to discuss them (see "Optional Friday Discussions" below).

Whichever option you choose, you should make sure to use quotes from the films you are analyzing. Essays should be a minimum of 2,000 words in length.

**Each person must make a formal presentation of her or his project, and these presentations should be about 10 minutes in length. Presentations will take place on the date and time scheduled for our final exam (TBA). There will be no formal exam for this class, but I will be grading the presentations. Attendance for all presentations is mandatory.

4. Class Participation

Participation will consist of attendance, contributions to class discussion, and answers to response questions on OWL-Space.

Attendance: Attendance is essential, and you are fully responsible for anything that you miss when you are absent. Excessive absences will negatively affect your participation grade.

Class Discussion: There is no getting around it—the only way to prepare for the discussions (and to write your responses) is to do the reading and watch the films. Although at times the reading load will be heavy, if you stay on schedule you should have no problem keeping up. In order to contribute to discussion, you must—in fact—speak. I realize that some students can be shy and that the thought of speaking aloud in class can make the knees quake with nervousness. In the professional world, however, rewards are only won through calculated risks. In this particular class, you need to

present your ideas during discussion in order to attain a participation grade with which you will be happy.

Because I will treat you with respect and professional courtesy, I expect the same from each of you in return. This means that cell phones should be placed in silent mode and stored out of sight, and laptops may only be used in special circumstances, with students submitting for approval a written request explaining these circumstances. You should also have your materials with you, you should be on time, and you should not leave early. Additionally, it is an outstanding idea not to fall asleep in class.

****I place a high value on personal accountability, so unprofessionalism may lead to one or more of the following outcomes: being marked absent, being asked to sing a rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" from *Les Miserables* for the class, being asked to memorize and recite the Gettysburg Address for your peers, being asked to perform a contemporary dance routine at the beginning of the next meeting. But I will probably just mark you absent.****

Responses: Beginning on January 20th, I will post a reading question on our OWL-Space page to which you must respond before each day's class. You must respond by 9:00 a.m. on the day the response is due (if not, it will be counted as a missed response), and you should be prepared to talk in class about what you have written as a means of engendering discussion.

Each response should be at least 200 words in length. There are no right or wrong answers here, but you cannot simply summarize the reading assignment. You must interact with the reading and engage it on an interpretive level. Missed responses will have a substantial impact on your overall participation grade.

5. Research Blog

We will be using a class blog to work through your ideas-in-progress and as a peer review platform. The blog is located at http://ricepixar.wordpress.com/.

Your first blog post, which is due on February 10th, should be a 250-word abstract of your argument for your *Finding Nemo/Incredibles* essay. You will also be required to respond to two of your colleagues' posts. Responses must be at least 150 words each, should be substantive, and are due on February 13th.

Your second blog post, which is due on March 17th, will be similar to the first in that you should craft a 250-word abstract of the argument for your *Toy Story 3/Up* essay. You will need to respond to two other posts as well. These responses are due on March 18^{9h} and should adhere to the same standards as those you made on the first post.

Finally, and you'll notice a pattern here, your third post will consist of a 250-word abstract of the argument for your *WALL-E* essay and is due on April 17th. Once again, you should respond to two other posts, and these are due on April 22nd.

Your blog posts and responses to your colleagues' work will all be graded together as a body of work at the end of the semester.

6. Twitter

The social media site Twitter has been gaining tremendous currency in the academic world as an instrument for sharing information, commenting on issues related to higher education, addressing issues in one's particular field, etc. As such, it has achieved acclaim for its use as a pedagogical tool to extend the work of the classroom. We are going to use Twitter in this course as a complement to our other activities and to augment the analytical work of the class. Beyond its relevance to the coursework, though, you are encouraged to explore the site as to its possibilities for professional networking for yourselves. Certainly you can choose to follow me (@joshua_r_eyler) and the other members of the class, but also follow leaders in your field. Make connections!

Although we will sometimes use Twitter in the classroom, the bulk of your Twitter activity will take place outside of class. You will be required to tweet a **minimum of four times per week**. The only guidelines for tweets are: 1) they must have something to do with the class (i.e. a response to the reading, a link to a related article, a question, etc.); 2) they must be substantive; and 3) they must be respectful. In addition to reading your tweets on a regular basis, I will be using an archiving site to keep track of Twitter activity.

You must use the hashtag **#RicePixar** in your tweets so that they register as being a part of our class discussion. Any tweets that do not incorporate this hashtag will not be counted, because the website will not record their activity.

I will hold a Twitter tutorial on the second day of class to help with the details of setting up your account and to answer any questions you might have.

Twitter activity will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Basic math tells me that **4 tweets per week X 14 weeks = 56 total tweets**. Thus, here are the quotas you will need to reach by the end of every month: January (**a minimum of 8 total tweets**), February (**a minimum of 24 total tweets**), March (**a minimum of 40 total tweets**), and April (**a minimum of 56 total tweets**). If you tweet the requisite number of times, then you will receive an **A** for this assignment. If not, you will receive an **F**.

7. Optional Friday Discussions

In order to successfully complete your final project (see above), you will need to view more films than we can productively cover in class. To give you an opportunity to discuss these movies, and because talking about Pixar films is just so darn fun, I have set up ***completely and totally optional*** discussion sessions on Fridays. Discussion sessions will be held from 2:00-3:30. Room is TBD. Feel free to invite anyone you know who might be interested in talking about these films. I know there are many on campus who

might want to just get together and chat about Pixar. Here is the schedule for these optional discussions:

Friday, January 30th: *Toy Story*
Friday, February 6th: *Toy Story 2*
Friday, February 13th: *A Bug's Life*
Friday, February 20th: *Ratatouille*
Friday, March 13th: *Toy Story 3*
Friday, March 20th: *Monsters, Inc.*
Friday, March 26th: *Brave*
Friday, April 10th: *Up*
Friday, April 17th: *WALL-E*

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:
Plagiarism, as its name seems to suggest, is the plague of the academic community and will not be tolerated in this class in any of its shapes or forms. Acts of plagiarism may include, but are not limited to, failure to properly cite an author's ideas, passing off another's work as your own, and giving another your work to pass off as his/her own.

Rice, of course, has a well-known and longstanding Honor Code. One of the purposes of the FWIS program is to help new students understand the Rice Honor Code and, more explicitly, to teach students the rules of paraphrasing and scholarly attribution, and the appropriate uses of different types of evidence. Accordingly, FWIS instructors will take an educational approach to transgressions of these rules and respond to errors in these areas foremost as issues for grading and opportunities to correct errors, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. At the same time, all FWIS instructors retain the authority to treat instances of repeat or egregious violations as matters for the attention of the Rice Honor Council.

In this course, students are expected to do the actual writing of their assignments on their own, with no outside help from anyone else. However, students are strongly encouraged (and will sometimes be required) to collaborate on all other aspects of their coursework; including discussing assignments, reading each other's work, and making suggestions for editing and revision.

Students with Disabilities:
If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs. I am committed to making the necessary arrangements that allow all students to participate fully and fairly in the educational process. To this end, all course materials can be made available in alternate formats such as large print, etc. by request.

Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication:
You are encouraged to make appointments with the peer consultants at the Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication for your assignments in this course. These consultants do not

proofread or edit your work, but they will provide feedback on topics such as the organization of your paper or presentation, the coherence of your argument, appropriate sentence structure, and consistent grammatical errors. You can make an appointment at the Center's website: cwovc.rice.edu.

A Word about Office Hours:
I strongly encourage all of my students to make use of my office hours as often as possible. Office hours can be used to discuss the readings in more detail, to explore drafts of your essays, to work through any difficulties you might be having with the course, or simply to let me know how you are doing.

Grading:
Students will be evaluated using the standard grading scale for Rice University: A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D, or F. I hold all of my students to high standards, and I have confidence that each of you will achieve great success if you are willing to put in the effort required for this course. Together, we will work to bring your writing and your analysis of literature to a level that demonstrates mastery of the course material, and you will reach the point where you are producing strong, well-developed, inventive arguments that utilize textual evidence in effective and even unique ways. In my classes, grades are earned; they are not rewards for hard work or effort. Hard work and effort are necessary concomitants to doing well in this course, but you will be graded on the degree of success you have achieved in your written work.

An A-paper is exceptional in every way—in its argument, analysis, organization, tone, and language.

A B-paper has a good argument but has flaws in organization, logic, analysis, or language that impede the development and the defense of the argument.

A C-paper has a poor argument along with major flaws in the development of the essay.

A D-paper has no argument, has no textual evidence, has not fulfilled the requirements of the assignment, or has some combination of these problems.

An F-paper has either completely missed the point of the assignment, or it is so far below the page requirement that it does not even merit reading, or it is a paper that has been plagiarized (a condition that comes with other, more severe penalties, as well—see below).

**Note: I do not discuss grades over email. If you wish to talk about your grades (and I am more than happy to do this), please set up a meeting with me.

Course Grade:

Final Project (including Presentation)	25%
WALL-E Essay	20%
Toy Story 3/*Up* Essay	15%
Finding Nemo/*Incredibles* Essay	10%
Toy Story Character Analysis	10%

Participation/OWL-Space Responses	10%
Research Blog	5%
Twitter	5%

Final Notes:

- I reserve the right to change any part of this syllabus at any time.
- All aspects of this course must be completed in order to earn a passing grade.

Course Calendar:

*Each reading assignment must be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.
**Unless I have indicated that we will watch a film in class, all movies must likewise be viewed by the date listed on the syllabus. I have arranged for these films to be digitized and uploaded onto our OWL-Space page.

Tu 1/13—Course Introduction and "The Pixar Theory"
Th 1/15—Logistics: Syllabus and Twitter
Tools for Interpreting Film
[Learning Survey due in class today, 1/15. Also, please sign up for a Twitter account at **www.twitter.com prior to class.]

The Beginnings

Tu 1/20—"The Adventures of André and Wally B." and "Luxo, Jr." (view in class)
Begin Discussion of *Toy Story*
Th 1/22—*Toy Story*
Discussion of Academic Writing and Argumentation

The Hero's Journey

Tu 1/27—Joseph Campbell, excerpts from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (handout)
Th 1/29—Continue Campbell
Begin Discussion of *Finding Nemo*
[*Toy Story* **Character Analysis due in class today, 1/29.]**

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (1/30): Toy Story***

Tu 2/3—*Finding Nemo*
Th 2/5—Begin Discussion of *The Incredibles*

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (2/6): Toy Story 2***

Tu 2/10—*The Incredibles*
[Research Blog Post #1 is due today, 2/10.]
Th 2/12—Reflecting on the Hero's Journey in Pixar films
[2 Responses to Research Blog Post #1 are due today, 2/12.]

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (2/13): A Bug's Life***

Loss and Grief in Children's Literature and Media
Tu 2/17—Discussion: Narratives of Loss
Th 2/19—A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* (all)

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (2/20): Ratatouille***

Tu 2/24—Continue *House at Pooh Corner*
Begin Discussion of *Toy Story 3*
Th 2/26—*Toy Story 3*

****[Final copy of the *Finding Nemo/Incredibles* essay is due in my office on Friday, 2/27 by 2:00.]**

Tu 3/3—Spring Break
Th 3/5—Spring Break

Tu 3/10—Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (3-106)
Th 3/12—*The Year of Magical Thinking* (107-227)
Begin Discussion of *Up*

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (3/13)—Toy Story 3***

Tu 3/17—*Up*
****[Research Blog Post #2 is due today, 3/17.]**
Th 3/19—*Toy Story 3*, *Up*, and Reflections on Grief and Loss
****[2 Responses to Research Blog Post #2 are due today, 3/19.]**

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (3/20)— Monsters, Inc.***

***WALL-E* and the Big Questions™**
Tu 3/24—Edward Humes, *Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash* (1-106)
Th 3/26—*Garbology* (107-207)
In Class Reading of Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (3/26)—Brave***

Tu 3/31—*Garbology* (208-end)
Begin Discussion of *WALL-E*
****[Final copy of *Toy Story 3*/*Up* essay is due in my office on Tuesday, 3/31 by noon.]**

Th 4/1—Midterm Recess

Tu 4/7—Henry David Thoreau, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" (from *Walden*—handout)
Th 4/9—Thoreau and *WALL-E*

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (4/10)—<u>Up</u>***

Tu 4/14—Workshop on Upcoming Writing Assignments (*WALL-E* Essay and Final Project)
****[Research Blog Post #3 is due today, 4/14.]**

Th 4/16—Hebrew Scriptures: Genesis 2-3
Continue *WALL-E*
****[2 Responses to Research Blog Post #3 are due today, 4/22.]**

- ***Optional Friday Discussion (4/17)—<u>WALL-E</u>***

Tu 4/21—Workshop on Upcoming Writing Assignments (*WALL-E* Essay and Final Project)
Th 4/23—Course Conclusion

Final Exam Date: TBA; <u>Final Projects are due on this date, and you will give your presentations during the time allotted for our exam.</u>